

*Article***Collage Portraits as a Method of Analysis in Qualitative Research**

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Abstract

This article explores the use of collage portraits in qualitative research and analysis. Collage portraiture, an area of arts-based research (ABR), is gaining stature as a method of analysis and documentation in many disciplines. This article presents a method of creating collage portraits to support a narrative thematic analysis that explored the impact of participation in an art installation construction. Collage portraits provide the opportunity to include marginalized voices and encourage a range of linguistic and non-linguistic representations to articulate authentic lived experiences. Other potential benefits to qualitative research are cross-disciplinary study and collaboration, innovative ways to engage and facilitate dialogue, and the building and dissemination of knowledge.

Keywords: portraiture, qualitative research, collage, narrative, social work

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Portraiture is a method of documentation, analysis, and narrative development that uses a variety of mediums including photography (Phillips & Bellinger, 2011), poetry (Hill, 2005; Witkin, 2007), jazz (Dixon, 2005), performance (Kuhn, 2010), and visual art (Butler-Kisber, 2008; Jongeward, 2009; Vaughan, 2005). In this article, I discuss the blending of the arts-based research methods and artistic genres of collage and portraiture as a method of analyzing qualitative interview data and creating a representation of the experiences of a family producing an art installation in rural Texas. In 2010, I gathered interviews with three family members about their participation in an art installation constructed at the site of the family homestead that burned to the ground in the late 1960s. Originally, I used socio-cultural narrative thematic methods seeking insight into the significance and meaning of the art installation. Further reading on arts-based research methods resulted in a decision to expand the study to include the production and use of collage portraits as a method of analysis. While the results of the art installation study are important for understanding the lived experiences of the African American family creating this installation, the present article focuses on the data collection and analysis as it applies to collage portraiture and how this methodology enhanced the researchers' understanding of the importance and impact of this art project on the family.

To attend to the focus of this article, I begin with an overview of collage and portraiture, its origin in the fine arts and as method of inquiry and analysis in qualitative research. The second section will discuss the position of the research in regards to the overall project. The Researcher-as-Participant Observer section of the article positions me as a participant and observer in the data collection phase of the project as well as researcher and artist during the data analysis and data display portions of the project. These positions are presented as dichotomous and mutually exclusive roles; however, they are more blurred and intertwined in the actual practice of qualitative research. The next section, Creating Collage Portraits, outlines the process used to analyze the visual data collected during the construction of the installation piece and data collected through the narrative interviews with participants in the art installation project. Thus, I discuss how the semi-structured interviews as part of the original research design were situated within the narrative tradition—and therefore interview participants' narratives about their family, the art installation project, and the impact of the project on the family were elicited—and later incorporated into the analysis process and the creation of collage portraits. I end this article with a discussion of the future directions and implications of collage portraits for qualitative research.

Collage and Portraiture

Collage and portraiture are two distinct methods of inquiry and analysis; however, combining collage with portraiture is not a new approach in the fine arts. The term *collage* originates from the French word “collé”—meaning glued. In the early 20th century, Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque introduced collage as a technique for cubist modern art pioneers. Collage upended conventional notions that a painting represents a uniform reality. In contrast, a collage fragments space and repurposes objects to contextualize multiple realities. The progression of the modern art movement and collage in particular serves as a corollary to postmodernist thought that challenges objectivity and a singular reality. For the past two decades qualitative research has expanded to include arts-based methods, such as literary techniques (e.g., fiction, poetry, and autoethnography), performance (e.g., dance, ethnodrama, and theater), visual art (e.g., painting, photographs, collage, sculpture, and art installations), new media (e.g., video, blogs, and zines) as well as folk art (e.g., quilts), to represent stories and voices traditionally silenced by textual and linguistic data collection and analysis methods (Knowles & Cole, 2008). The researcher in arts-based research has the options of being the observer to the art making process (i.e., using the artistic creations as data) or being actively involved as the artist who creates as part of the research, or using a combination of the above approaches to incorporate art as a form of data

collection and source for analysis (Higgs, 2008). Although qualitative researchers assuming either of these positions are deeply involved in the process, the researcher who creates an art piece to represent informants' narratives must deftly strike a balance between their personal creative expressions, discretion, and attending to the voices they are representing. A solid philosophical framework is necessary to ensure arts-based methods are part of research as opposed to art for art's sake (Barone & Eisner, 1997). Much like other arts-based methods of map-making (Powell, 2010), ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2003), and photography (Phillips & Bellinger, 2011), collage portraiture has the potential to support and enliven the analysis of otherwise dry and detached interview data, thus producing new knowledge and interpretation.

Collage has become increasingly popular in arts-based research (Butler-Kisber et al., 2002-2003; Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010; Davis, 2008; Davis & Butler-Kisber, 1999). Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) used a technique of clustering collages to investigate visual tools for experiential research approaches: "Collaging can also be helpful in conceptualizing a phenomenon by fleshing out different facets in order to get a nuanced understanding of it" (p. 4). Davis and Butler-Kisber (1999) used collage as an analytic tool for memoing, lauding the flexibility of collage to both contextualize and categorize. Butler-Kisber and Poldma (2010) identify three attributes of collage in qualitative research: "as a reflective process, as a form of elicitation, and as a way of conceptualizing ideas" (p. 3). Diaz (2002) used collage as a research tool to blend images and text to create a reality and find meaning, most notably in the study of gendered social roles in 1950s middle class white America using the art as a symbol and metaphor. Furthermore, Diaz (2002) posits that the visual arts can open up dialogue among diverse people, offer new insights and reflection, and provide new ways to critique a subject. In her study of her father's early life, Vaughan (2005) used collage as a way to create new meanings from selected images, and she views collage as a method of gathering, selecting, analyzing, and presenting—a methodological process similar to traditional qualitative research.

Portraiture, also a traditional genre of visual art, is incorporated into arts-based qualitative research in a way that is similar to collage yet adds aspects not found in collage. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005), inspired by her experience of sitting for two portraits, developed portraiture as a method of inquiry to capture the institutional character and culture of six high schools; she aspired to create a "painting with words" (p. 6). Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) described the techniques of portraiture and its limitations, as well as its use as a mode of inquiry intended to create a bridge and dialogue between science and art. Lawrence-Lightfoot's (2005) narratives inspire a crossing and redefining of boundaries that blaze a trail for the expansion of portraiture into a range of arts-based genres including poetry, photography, jazz performance, and visual art. Dixon (2005), influenced by Lawrence-Lightfoot, uses jazz as a metaphor in portraiture and states that "the portrait represents, in part, the portraitist's vision or seeing of the subject" (p. 112). Since the inception of the modern art era, many well-known modern artists, including Romare Bearden, Frieda Kahlo, George Grosz, and Robert Rauschenberg, combined collage and portraiture in their work. The combination of collage and portraiture and the use of a variety of materials extend the conversation between researcher and researched beyond the actual representation of the subject to include the meaning of the repurposed materials as an integral part of the composition. Therefore the use of collage as a technique in creating a portrait allows the researcher-artist to add dimension and depth to their analysis and interpretation as well as play with texture, colour, and form as transcendent processes in depicting the complexity of the research subject.

Jongeward's (2009) research on adult experiences of learning and creativity included visual portraits that served as a model for the development of my collage portraits. She described her arrival at making visual portraits while working on data analysis, categorizing interviews, and

reflecting on participants' journal writing. Though Jongeward felt close to her research participants' attitudes and perspectives, she thought that the process of segmenting and coding data diminished her image of the whole person. Inspired by Jongeward (2009), who was compelled to make visual images at critical times during the research process to "gain energy, clarity, and insight" (p. 242), I embarked on the creation of collage portraits to better understand and represent the stories told by my research participants. My relationship to the art installation project and land is through my African American husband who grew up there during the era of segregation and moved away after high school, returning with me (a white woman) and our two children.

Researcher as Participant Observer

My original intention for this study was to use a traditional narrative method, as described by Riessman (2008), to examine the perspective of those who helped create an art installation constructed on the land of an African American family homestead destroyed over forty years ago (see Figure 1). After the interviews and transcriptions were completed, I began an initial socio-cultural thematic analysis to locate strong themes that would provide insight into the meaning of creating an art installation on family land. I felt as if rich details about the participants' experiences were "packed away," thus removing me from the lived experiences of those I interviewed. Furthermore, the impromptu animation and emotions expressed during the interview process seemed shrouded and collapsed into categories and folders during traditional text-based analyses. I asked myself: if the vibrant and rich stories felt lost to me, how could I authentically represent them?



Figure 1. Art installation in Texas.

I returned to the literature in search of visual methods to employ as an additional layer of analysis that would include my perspective as a visual artist. I was attracted to visual methods as an artist, and I felt these techniques would enable me to better understand, analyze, and represent the stories of the participants. Although the subject matter involved the lived experiences of making an art installation, the motivation to pursue visual methods was grounded in my experience as an artist.

Riessman (2008) provides several examples of visual analysis as a technique. I was particularly taken by Creef's (2004) use of archival images and historical documents to construct a story. I wanted to use visual images and archival documents, including newspaper stories written about the art installation piece and the black history project that occurred as a result of the art project on the family land. The methods of visual analysis I read about reminded me of a series of collage paintings I created in Ghana depicting the trajectory of my children's African ancestry from West Africa to Texas, where their father was born and raised. The Ghana paintings are described as visual stories and memory keys and seem quite similar to the collages discussed in social science in the literature (Leavy, 2009; Vaughan, 2005). Based on my examination of the literature, I discovered a precedent in using collage and portraiture in qualitative research and decided to experiment with the collage technique for this study. The interviews, transcripts, photographs, and archival documents that respondents gave me provided a rich source from which to proceed with incorporating collage portraiture into the analysis process.

Combining the roles of artist and researcher in a formal process was a new experience for me. Additionally, I was the instigator of the art installation and a family member; therefore, I reflected on my field notes, which were written prior to the decision to create collage portraits, to better position myself in the research. I interviewed three participants, two of whom were family members and one a neighbor and long standing friend of the family. All are African American women between 50 and 60 years who were born and raised in the town where the installation was constructed. Participants in the art installation also included family members from out of town; however, I decided to interview participants who resided in the town because the art installation remained part of their daily lives. The interview process, field notes, and transcripts provided me with reflective tools to consider my dual role as participant and observer.

Pinar (2004) described the merging of roles as "a/r/t"—a metaphor for the three roles of artist-researcher-teacher, which are integrated to create a "third space, an in-between space, where knowing, doing and making merge" (p. 9). The third space can also be seen as a place where image and word and the subjective and objective meet (Leavy, 2009). Qualitative research, like artistic practice, can be viewed as a craft. Qualitative researchers do more than gather data and write; they "compose, orchestrate and weave" (Leavy, 2009, p. 10). Another comparison Leavy makes between artists and qualitative researchers is that their work is about representing a set of meanings. As both artist and researcher, I strived to represent the experiences described to me in a way that matched the emotion and expression of my participants.

Interviews provided the focal source of data for three collage portraits. Secondary data points included informants' photographs and archival data as well as materials from my collection of family photographs, newspaper articles, and archival documents. I analyzed the informant interviews by reviewing the transcribed interviews and listening to the recorded interviews for informants' inflections, tone of voice, and other aspects of the interviews that could not be captured in transcription. During the initial review of an interview, I jotted down notes on the transcript, marked sections of the interview in which the informant made references to visual material or significant historical events, and noted portions of the interview in which the informant was animated in their speech. Thus, in the initial review of an interview I attended to speech patterns, intonation, injection of humor, and emotion. After this initial analysis of all the interviews, I had a preliminary understanding of the participants' overall stories, the meaning of the art installation in their lives, and the major themes drawn from both the informants' perspective of the art installation and my experience as a participant observer.

A secondary aspect of this initial analysis was my visualization of the informants' participation in building the art installation. In reviewing the initial analysis I stated the following in my field

notes: “I was able to feel words not just comprehend them. I could visualize the participants sitting on the lot with family members in the wee hours of the morning after a full day of work under the hot summer sun, telling stories, and sipping beer.” This secondary aspect of the analysis requires the researcher to examine the textual materials for words and concepts that inspire imagery and visuals related to the phenomena. In other words, I both listened to interviews and read the transcripts for themes and visual cues into the participants’ experiences.

Words, concepts, and stories that informants repeated in the interviews were then set aside for creating the collage portraits; these concepts and words best represented the experience of working on the art installation piece. Next, I examined the photographs, archival data, and other materials provided by the informants for images mentioned in the informants’ narratives. I made colour copies of the photographs and newspaper articles about the project and then arranged them on art paper along with printed text. My intention was to create a visual portrait of each informant’s narrative. This process helped me gain a global perspective of the informant’s narrative and its meaning. I relied on a combination of my artistic intuition and cognition to create the collage. Because some consider art an emotive process, the construction of the collage portrait at this stage is more a representation of my interpretation of the narrative, my emotional response to the informant’s narrative, and the experiences of both the informant and the researcher.

The emotive aspect of creating the collage portraits was grounded in what I felt was my artistic intuition developed over 45 years of creating art. My practice as an artist is not one that follows a script. When choosing colours I did not necessarily think through what colour to use; rather, the process is one of letting my fingers roam above the oil pastels, and somehow they land where they are supposed to. Synthesizing the cognitive aspect of being a researcher with the emotive and intuitive processes of being an artist was enhanced by the richness and diversity of the data, which included field notes, interview recordings and transcripts, photographs, and archival documents. The process of creating the collage portraits is much like a hybrid performance of choreographed and improvisational dance, going back and forth between the methodical steps of the narrative research design and the more emotive and generative processes inherent in creating art. Creating a collage portrait as part of the research process also allows for a multisensory interaction with the data, with the researcher quite literally touching the words and images of the narrative. This is a unique distinction between the artist as researcher who creates art as part of the research and researcher who uses art provided by the informant.

Creating Collage Portraits

Once I created the first collage portrait, I replicated the method in the subsequent two portraits. The process of creating a collage portrait is described in detail as follows: A block of time was reserved to listen to the interviews in a quiet space. The phone was turned off to prevent interruptions. Listening to the interviews, I took notes by hand, stopping the recorder to write direct quotations or to be certain the words were heard correctly. Several of the informants are animated and talkative; therefore, attention was paid to speech patterns, intonation, and injection of humor and emotion. Listening to the interviews provided a more cohesive reflection of the participants’ stories about working on the installation piece and its meaning in their lives.

After taking notes by hand, statements that best represented the stories and experience of working on the art installation piece were highlighted. Those statements were typed on the computer using a large font size and then printed out. The next step was to look through photographs and newspaper articles about the installation construction and make copies of photographs that were referenced in the stories and newspaper articles about the project in order to include them in the

collage. The intention was to create a visual portrait of each informant to represent the meaning of their experience working on the installation piece as they described it. A white foam board was used for the collage portrait because of its durability and smooth surface that is excellent for adhering paper, photographs, and newspaper with spray photo mount.

A critical step in the analysis process was literally cutting portions of text. This helped identify and segment elements of the story, and how they related to the event. After cutting the text into chunks, themes emerged through the tactile process of grouping and arranging related text in sections on the white foam board. The photographs and newspaper articles were examined, and then I began to experiment with placement on the foam board. This process helped me acquire a global perspective of the story and its meanings.

After arranging the text and photographs into thematic sections, I applied oil bar and oil pastels to continue to draw images and quotations from the participants on the collage portraits. The selection of colours was a subjective choice and representative of the emotive process derived from my interaction with the narrative. I flowed back and forth between the text and images, all the while returning to my notes and the interview to remain tethered to the narrative. In remaining connected to the interview, I attempted to convey what Jongeward (2009) refers to as the perspective of the participant using visual imagery while maintaining “the integrity and complexity of who they are” (p. 243).

The creation of the first collage portrait resulted in an eight-step method described below:

1. Listening to the interview, taking notes by hand, and highlighting portions of the text;
2. Typing the notes and printing them out in large font;
3. Cutting portions of the text to place on the collage;
4. Selecting images;
5. Arranging text, photographic images, and archival documents;
6. Identifying the themes as they emerge;
7. Applying colour, texture, hand drawn imagery, and words; and
8. Continually referring back to notes and transcripts, making additions of text and images to the collage as needed.

Figures 2, 3, and 4 below are the finished products of constructing a collage portrait:



Figure 2. Collage portrait of CH.



Figure 3. Collage portrait of JB.



Figure 4. Collage portrait of BG.

Analysis

The data collected for the study included interviews of participants, photographs of the art installation construction, archival documents (newspaper articles about the art construction and its impact on the community, historical photographs, and other print documents), and field notes written after each interview. The use of collage as analysis allowed for the collaboration between researcher and participants to carry on throughout the analysis instead of stopping at the end of the data collection process, thus balancing the validity of participants' meaning making with that of the scholar. The question posed at the beginning of this study, "What was the impact of creating an art installation piece on family land on the people who participated in it?" was answered in the collective and the personal. The impact of participating in the construction and the art installation itself was meaningful for the participants interviewed, and although they shared common themes, emphasis varied depending on their personal trajectory, which varied among the women. Themes emerged in the process of creating the collages as indicated in the aforementioned eight-step process. The combination of listening to the interviews a second or third time with the physical act of juxtaposing the photographs, text, and newspaper articles prior to adhesion brought forth the themes in a pronounced way.

Images—which may include words—have the capacity for evoking meaning and feeling not available in written transcripts. The use of collage in this particular data analysis worked by bringing informant reminiscence to immediacy, making data fragments more whole, and assembling disparate kinds of data together in a single visual representation. The process and resulting portraits informed analysis and findings by making dialogue accessible, essentially moving the meaning of memories forward in time. An informant sharing a memory has meaning, a photograph from an informant's collection means something, and the combination can reveal meaning greater than the simple sum of its parts. While there are aspects of imagery and visual communication that defy language, an example from this study may demonstrate the contribution collage portraits can make to data analysis. I had the participants' stories and commentary in transcripts, their tone of voice and other sounds (such as laughter or silence) in the audio

recordings, a fragment of the family home in an old black and white family photograph, oil pastels, and my artistic skills to work with. Through collage I extended the image of the house from a corner of an old photograph, based on descriptions by the informants, by drawing additional details of the house onto the image. The result was the representation of a home, complete with windows and colour, movement and dimension. The collage portraiture portion of data analysis allowed me to locate new aspects of people's memories and to better understand the meaning they attributed to places and experiences in their past.

The three informants, Connie, Barbara, and Julie, are African American women and lifelong residents of the rural town. Connie and Julie are 52 years old, and Barbara is 64 years old. They all attended the same segregated schools growing up. Connie was born into the family, Julie is related by marriage and also distantly through her maternal grandmother, and Barbara is a close friend of the family who still lives across the street from the site of the family homestead and where the art installation was constructed. None of the women reported being involved in making artwork prior to working on the art installation.

Common themes that emerged from the interviews were the meaning of art, working (on the piece), connection to the land and family, history, and transformation/change. Two sub-themes also emerged, including one informant's realizing of her "real life" and another's profound reverence of the family house. The themes were sometimes overlapping. Connection to the land and family shared ground with history of the black community. Working together and connection to the family were synonymous for some participants. The themes were interchangeable and often converged in the stories of the participants. Transforming the land, resurrecting the home into a symbolic structure, and engaging in a collective process of creating an art installation wove the common themes into a tapestry that became visible in the collage portraits. Revealed at the same time was the unique personal aspect of each person's story.

Adding collage portraits to the narrative thematic analysis developed a parallel narrative for me as I embarked on a transformative journey by joining an artistic endeavor to my research, much like the first time artist-participants experienced transformation by engaging in arts practice. Additionally, a third aspect to the transformative theme for both participant observer and the participants was the actual physical transformation of the land from overgrown lot to an interactive and functioning site of memory. The weaving and bobbing of themes and processes is embedded in the narratives of all the participants, including myself, and shares a collective place in the collage portraits.

This research was framed in a social constructionist perspective. According to Crotty (1998), humans are in the world making sense of it. Lock and Strong (2010) discuss meaning making from a social constructionist perspective as follows: "ways of meaning-making, being inherently embedded in socio-cultural processes, are specific to particular times and places. Thus, the meanings of particular events, and our ways of understanding them, vary over different situations" (p. 7). Documenting the experience of creating an art installation piece and the resulting text, photographs, video, and art piece itself, provided me with an opportunity to interpret meaning in the setting where the meaning making occurred. Constructionist research invites new practices of meaning making suitable for the rebuilding of individual and collective memories, which includes the polarity of joyful remembrances of family and community and the painful sting of segregation and racism. Moreover, this method has the potential to provide insights to critical emancipatory positions. Like feminism, this method uses memory as a touchstone and illuminates experiences (Grbich, 2007). Additionally, as with Afrocentricity this method calls on reciprocity for the collaborative construction of meaning (Asante, 2007; Gilbert, Harvey, & Belgrave, 2009).

The creation of collage portraits extended a social constructionist perspective into the analysis with visual depictions of the meaning expressed by the informants that connected the polarity, richness, and complexity of their past to who they have become and to how their participation in the construction of an art installation paid tribute to family, community, and their individual transformation. Social constructionism frames the context of meaning making and social experience to include the “individually encapsulated information processors” as well as “a shared experiential world with other people” (Lock & Strong, 2010, p. 5). Although each informant participated in the same art installation activity, the experience resulted in both shared and individually created meaning, which was evident in the common and unique themes that emerged from the interviews and was later depicted in the collage portraits. A key consideration in the analysis was my multiple roles as researcher, artist, family member, and instigator of the art installation. Knowles and Cole (2008) state:

As in most qualitative research, the subjective and reflexive *presence of the researcher* is evident in the research text in varying ways depending on the focus and purpose of the inquiry. In arts-informed research, however, the researcher’s artistry is also predominant. ... Extending the idea from qualitative inquiry of “researcher as instrument,” in arts-informed research the “instrument” of research is also the researcher-as-artist. (p. 61)

The rigorous method described in the previous section allowed me to examine the experience of working on the art installation from the perspective of the informants. Functioning as artist and researcher, I depicted their experience through the creation of collage portraits that were layered on top of the narrative analysis.

Once the portraits were completed, I presented them to the research participants as a form of member checking. At the informants’ request, other family members and friends were invited to view the collage portraits. Each of the collages sparked excited discussions about the themes and photographs, resulting in the retelling of stories from the day of the art installation and sharing of memories provoked by the collage portraits. Unlike the representation of interviews through textual materials, the visual representation of the narratives brought forth statements about the informants’ experiences, such as “Those are my words, that’s me!”

Future Directions and Implications for Qualitative Research

“The arts and humanities deserve attention as a valuable means for tempering and humanizing our methods, for drawing us closer to wisdom” (Goldstein, 1997, p. 31).

The process of creating collage portraits provided “another layer of vision,” allowing collage portraits to convey stories by weaving together words and images. This process also allowed me to integrate my artistic instincts with my position as a social work researcher, using both disciplines to depict narratives in a new form. Collage portraits offer qualitative research a range of approaches to complement more traditional methods in gaining a deeper and authentic understanding of individuals and their challenges within cultural, political, and societal contexts. Collage portraiture’s utility is varied and flexible, and this method can be used by researcher and participant in the process of data collection, analysis, and dissemination.

The body of literature on portraiture and its use in qualitative research exists in a variety of disciplines, including social work (Chambon, 2008; Phillips & Bellinger, 2011), education and evaluation (Barone & Eisner, 2006; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005), nursing (Casey, 2009), poetry (Hill, 2005), jazz (Dixon, 2005), psychology (Estrella & Forinash, 2007), and memory studies (Kuhn, 2010). Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) described portraiture as “a blend between art and

science” (p. 6). The extent that portraiture has been infused so broadly in qualitative research speaks to its utility and potential, and portraiture provides an opportunity for both researcher and participant to engage in a collaborative process of generating and disseminating knowledge.

Bringing the completed collage portraits back to the participants is a way to spark dialogue and insight as an additional part of the interview process. This can also be used as a form of member checking. The interview schedule can include questions about the photographs and archival documents chosen, such as why were they selected and what is their meaning and connection to the participant’s experience. The responses can also be used in the analysis as a comparison to the recorded interview. Reliance on traditional interview schedules can be a limitation and inhibit participants who have rich experiences to share and are less comfortable articulating themselves with words. The positioning of interviewer and interviewee can be intimidating to participants who have not had experience being interviewed and articulating their experience into a voice recorder. They may also feel uncomfortable in the spotlight or unaccustomed to outsiders being interested in them or their stories. A particularly powerful aspect of this arts-based method is its potential to capture the interactions between researcher and participants to create and share new knowledge.

Another possible use of collage portraits is for informants to create their own collage portraits as part of the interview process. Although there may be initial hesitation to engage in art related activities, potential solutions are having the researcher model the process, provide examples of collage portraits previously created by participants, and be prepared to discuss any fears or apprehensions about making art before attempting the collage. Collaborating about which material to include in the collage is also a way to ease into the art making experience, and it provides a potentially rich opportunity to gain insight and information about the participant’s experiences. The participants who created the art installation quickly overcame their fear of art and soon identified themselves as artists as a result of their involvement. The process I developed for creating collage portraits allows for creativity in articulating and depicting stories for both researcher and participant.

Researchers creating collage portraits also have an opportunity to reflect on similar questions mentioned above. These reflections can be included in field notes, research memos, and in a final written analysis. For researcher/artists familiar with collage technique and art making the experience may seem more like a natural collision of worlds than for a novice attempting to use collage portraits for the first time; however, the process can be used without any formal art training or use of hand drawn or painted images. In fact, that is the appeal of collage work; it does not require prior art experience. Novices cutting and pasting images, using text from interviews, and experimenting with different materials to include have the potential to produce an equally representative collage portrait as those with art backgrounds. Collage portraits offer scholars a venue for producing research that is adaptable to diverse populations and conveys meaning beyond the constraints of language.

The nature of collage work that involves piecing together fragments to form a whole serves as a corollary to the process of qualitative analysis that involves connecting various data points, including interview transcripts, research memos, visual and archival documents, and reflective notes. Qualitative data analysis software such as NVivo, HyperRESEARCH, ATLAS.ti, and Transana are touted as a way to connect visual data with other data points. One of the advantages of using this software is the ability to perform multiple tasks within a “bounded conceptual space, [where] cognition is not interrupted but can significantly advance without pause” (Bassett, 2011, p. 531). Qualitative software offers promise for the integration of visual images in analysis; however, the process of creating collage portraits is a distinct process that involves a multisensory

experience and offers creative latitude for the researcher, informant, and academic community. The qualitative analysis of data uses the researcher as the primary analytic tool, making multiple forms of knowledge available for study. Collage portraiture utilizes the researcher's creativity and emotional responses in the analysis process through the placement of photographs, archival documents, text, and colour to suggest how the events and feelings represented by these choices are connected, yet cannot be reduced, into a logical, linear narrative.

Collage portraits provide researchers an alternative method to represent stories and participants an opportunity to articulate their experiences using materials of their choosing. Collage portraits also present an opportunity to use visual displays in scholarly publications to relate field notes and express what was shared, showed, and told during an interview, including non-verbal expressions. Creating visual depictions using text from interviews, photographs, archival data, and created imagery provides the researcher and participant with methods to engage sensitive issues that might be difficult to articulate with words. When they viewed their collages, the delight expressed by the participants who helped create the art installation reflected their pride in that their actual words, family memorabilia, and participation in the art installation were worthy of including as data, for analysis, and as the inspiration to create a work of art. Collage portraits move beyond the traditional research outcome of publication in a journal participants may never read to sharing the results of the inquiry and feeling a part of the process from beginning to end.

As part of the larger continuum of arts-based research, collage portraits hold promise to inform qualitative research by expanding the breadth and depth of voices contributing to the knowledge base. By including participants in a method that results in a piece of art they can later view, perhaps even own or have copies of, an invitation is extended to be an active part of the process. Participants may be more willing to engage and dialogue about sensitive and important issues of which researchers need a more authentic and diverse understanding. Stories are the essence of the human experience; therefore, the more versatile and innovative qualitative research becomes in capturing the experiences of those we seek to understand, the stronger our position to facilitate dialogue and interventions that further a more just, inclusive, and responsive society.

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